Colchester Public Schools

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Superintendent

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Dear Students, Staff and Families:

Last evening Bacon Academy Principal Amy Begué delivered a presentation to the Colchester Board of Education regarding the possibility of a “school within a school” magnet program at Bacon Academy. While Ms. Begué was the presenter, this work has not happened in isolation. During both the transition of leadership and budget processes last year, I heard from several people about the decrease in enrollment at Bacon Academy and the program limitations associated with reduced enrollment. At the same time, our students, staff and community members talked about the importance of expanding career pathway opportunities for students. This led to the formation of a “Pride and Purpose” subcommittee composed of district staff, Board of Education members, parents and community members to explore the possibility of a magnet program at Bacon.

The BA Magnet committee is chaired by Ms. Begué and Director of School Counseling, Ashley Zaugg. Ms. Begué and Ms. Zaugg did quite a bit of research on successful programs around the country, and gauged the interest of recent graduates, current students and community members before the first official meeting of the committee this fall. Ultimately this committee has proposed a magnet program with the following pathway programs: Fire and Public Safety, Allied Health including certification programs for EMT and CNA, Education, Aviation and Air Force ROTC.

While we are only in the early stages of this process, we are excited about the opportunities that a program like this presents for the students of Bacon Academy. An increased enrollment at Bacon Academy would allow us to add Pre-AP classes, elective courses in content areas including but not limited to English, Social Studies and Science and perhaps other gifted and talented classes. It may also allow us to restore sub-varsity and varsity athletic programs which have diminished in recent years. For example, .at one point in time Bacon had freshman boys basketball, freshman girls soccer and varsity tennis. We also believe this will benefit the local community. For example, our early childhood centers struggle to fill vacant positions, Fire Chief Steve Hoffman tells us that the Hayward Fire Department has seen a decrease in volunteers in recent years, and the ambulance service certainly needs more EMT’s.

Understandably, a proposal like this leads to questions. That is why we’ve communicated openly about this since the beginning of the school year. We’ve spoken about the Magnet possibility in Parent Square messages, newsletters and at public meetings. Please be assured that we will continue to do so every step of the way. With that in mind, please reference our communications

and reach out directly if you have questions. While I know that we live in a social media world, you cannot rely upon Facebook for accurate, reliable information unless it is our official page.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Sullivan, III
Superintendent of Schools

FAQ's

When did the district talk about the magnet school?

Please click here for a detailed history. BA Magnet Initial Discussions

What was shared by Ms. Begué at the Board Meeting?

Please click here for a summary. BA Magnet Presentation Notes from BOE Meeting 1.9.24

Where is Colchester at in the process?

The Colchester Public Schools submitted an initial proposal to the Connecticut Department of Education in late December and is submitting a revised proposal this week.

Does this mean that Bacon Academy would become a magnet school and anyone from anytown could attend Bacon?

No, and no. The proposal calls for the establishment of a "school within a school" model with specific magnet programs. Enrollment in the school would require an application process and selection would be determined via a lottery process managed by the state. Continued enrollment would be contingent on enrollment in magnet school courses.

Would magnet school students take classes with non-magnet students?

Yes. All magnet school students would be Bacon Academy students. This means that they would take the core curriculum classes in the main building with everyone else, and be full participants in all Bacon Activities.

Could Colchester students attend the magnet school?

Yes, Colchester students are permitted to apply to the magnet school. They would also go through the lottery process and no more than 25% of the students in any magnet program may be from the host community.

What does this mean for activities and athletics?

Again, all magnet school students would be Bacon Academy students. They would be eligible to audition for roles in drama productions, music ensembles and to try out for athletic teams.

Would out-of-district students be expected to adhere to the rules of Bacon Academy?

Yes, as all magnet students are Bacon Academy students, they would be held to the same academic and behavioral standards. The magnet school and associated programs may also have higher standards in some instances. For example, you may need a minimum grade in some prerequisite courses before enrolling in the EMT class, or the ROTC program may have higher behavioral expectations.

What diploma would magnet students receive at graduation?

They would receive a Bacon Academy diploma and a certificate of completion from the to be named magnet school.

Do we have room for additional students and programs?

Bacon Academy was built to accommodate approximately 850 students in the main building. As such, the school has capacity for magnet students in our classrooms, cafeteria and media center. In terms of space for these specialized programs, the magnet application requests demolition of the portables behind the gym and construction of a metal building with classrooms, a lab space and garage bay for specialized equipment.

For context, Bacon had 907 students in 2014, 816 students in 2017, 772 students in 2020, and 661 in 2023.

How can the town afford this?

The magnet school application includes a staffing request from the state for 5 full-time teachers and a school counselor. In addition, the Colchester Public Schools would receive tuition for out-of-district students to offset operating costs in the general education program. Colchester would not be responsible for providing transportation.

Could special education students attend the magnet school?

Yes. Magnet schools are part of the public education system and are required by federal law, specifically the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), to provide appropriate services and accommodations to students with disabilities. Colchester Public Schools would not be responsible for the cost of these services.

Do you have a copy of the presentation Ms. Begué delivered at the Board meeting?

Yes, please click the following link. Bacon Academy Magnet Presentation

Do you have a copy of the application that was submitted to the Department of Education?

Yes, please click the following link. Magnet School Application

Shouldn't the community have the opportunity to weigh in on something like this?

Absolutely. That is why we've communicated about our work since September. At the same time, we need to respect the process. While we are optimistic about our prospects, we have only submitted an initial application. If the state confirms interest, we will keep you informed and will hold a special meeting of the Board of Education at the proper stage of the process.